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SUBJECT: MUTHANNA-BASED IRAQI ARMY UNITS UNREADY FOR BSP

Classified By: Classified by PRT Muthanna Team Leader Phillip Egger for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a PRT Muthanna cable.

¶11. (S) Summary: The Iraqi Army's Second Battalion, Second Brigade of the Tenth Division, based in Muthanna, is comprised of poorly motivated soldiers who appear ill-prepared for their imminent participation in the Baghdad Security Plan. During six days of training exercises with Australian forces the Iraqi soldiers demonstrated poor motivation, weak discipline, ineffective command, and a tendency to regress to bad habits. Absent comprehensive institutional reforms and close supervision, the battalion will be unable to execute complex military operations as it participates in the Baghdad Security Plan. End Summary.

Poor Motivation

¶12. (S) From April 14-18, PRT Muthanna officers observed an Australian military team training four companies of the Iraqi Second Battalion, Second Brigade, Tenth Division at Eastern Barracks, near Samawah. Although progress was evident, the overall performance of the Iraqi soldiers was poor. Major James Greenshields (protect), commander of the training task force, said poor motivation is a serious detriment to the Battalion's effectiveness. To illustrate this, he pointed to the fact that Iraqi soldiers are known to disappear from exercises without explanation.

¶13. (S) Most enlisted soldiers see military service as nothing more than a paycheck. An Australian soldier with experience training five different Iraqi units, estimated that up to 20 percent of the Second Battalion will desert upon receipt of their next paycheck, and would not join the fight in Baghdad. To guard against this, Iraqi officers will delay disbursing salaries until the soldiers are near Baghdad. One Iraqi commander, however, was willing to let poorly motivated soldiers desert, as he judged them more likely to get their comrades killed in Baghdad. (NOTE: Junior Iraqi soldiers asked PRT officers to intervene with Iraqi commanders to pay the soldiers' salaries in Samawah, prior to the unit's departure for Baghdad. PRT officers declined to involve themselves in this matter.)

Discipline Problems

¶14. (S) Australian trainers relayed to PRT officers many incidents of poor discipline among the Iraqi trainees, including lackadaisical physical training, blatant insubordination, and rumored sexual abuse of younger recruits. Some Iraqi officers claim to Australian trainers that tribal influences prevent them from responding to such incidents, for fear of disciplining enlisted soldiers with

links to powerful sheiks. However, a senior Iraqi officer and Major Greenshields believe that this is merely a red-herring used by weak leaders to excuse their inability to control their troops. One Australian officer thought the problem of tribal pressure would become less pronounced as the unit adds additional soldiers from the surrounding provinces and becomes less closely tied to Muthanna. Regardless of the underlying cause, discipline continues to be problematic and hampers the effectiveness of Iraqi units.

Illogical Command Structure

15. (S) Officers in the Iraqi Second Battalion often obtain rank through family connections, and are not necessarily well-educated, nor competent as soldiers. Consequently, Iraqi officers were largely unwilling to lead from the front -) refusing to participate in physical training with their enlisted ranks and attempting to direct simulated operations from the sidelines with notebooks rather than amidst the action. The Battalion also lacks empowered and assertive Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) who, in other armies, form the backbone of the enlisted ranks, act as a chain of command, and provide seasoned leadership to more inexperienced soldiers. (Note: While Western armies have a long NCO tradition, the concept is new to the Iraqi Army.)

16. (S) Most of the senior officers exhibited little care for the troops under their command, and took no action to correct unsanitary living conditions, or other problems affecting the welfare and morale of enlisted soldiers. Compounding the problem is what Major Greenshields described as the Iraqi belief that knowledge equals power, and the tendency of officers to hoard information, leaving subordinates unable to

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exercise initiative or independent judgment.

17. (S) The consequences of this poor structure were evident. The Battalion commander was absent for all of these critical pre-deployment training exercises with the Australians and will not return from Germany until May 2. Of note, Colonel Sadoon, the last Second Battalion commander, is currently under house arrest for fraud and corruption.

Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back

18. (S) A common refrain among the Australian trainers is that a week of training is insufficient to overcome the Iraqi soldiers' low base-level of military competency. While some progress was made, the consensus amongst the Australians is that absent substantial ongoing training and supervision, the majority of soldiers will revert to their old ways, characterized by a lack of motivation and the "insha'allah mindset". The Australian commander estimates only about ten percent of the battalion is comprised of highly-motivated Iraqi soldiers who perform well. The Iraqis will continue to be trained over the coming month, and will have an opportunity to improve their competency during a live-fire exercise at Besmara. With this additional training the Iraqi unit may be able to execute the simpler missions of the BSP.

Dangerous to Depend on Second Battalion for BSP

19. (S) Comment: The Iraqi Army exercises witnessed by PRT Muthanna, combined with the assessments of their Australian trainers, bode ill for the unit's upcoming participation in the Baghdad Security Plan. So long as the soldiers lack motivation, suffer from weak leadership, and have poor combat skills, they will likely not be an effective fighting force. An army from which a substantial portion of the enlisted

ranks is likely to desert upon payday, in which officers abuse their positions of power and demonstrate poor leadership, is one that we depend upon at our own peril. The lesson from a week of observation was that for training to be effective, it must be both long-term and embedded. Ideally, this would include personnel who are experienced trainers and have some knowledge of Arabic. Short-term training may produce individual soldiers who, on paper, are ready to fight, but it cannot overcome institutional obstacles to produce an effective combat unit. Long-term training conducted by a single Coalition unit offers a better chance of success. End Comment.

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